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Questions relating to information

Report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Rapporteur: Mr. Bernard **Tanoh-Boutchoué** (Côte d'Ivoire)

I. Introduction

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 15 September 1998, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-third session the item entitled "Questions relating to information" and to allocate it to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

2. The Fourth Committee considered the item at its 2nd and 19th to 21st meetings, on 17 September and on 13, 16 and 17 November 1998 (see A/C.4/53/SR.2 and 19–21).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Information;[1]

(b) Report of the Secretary-General (A/53/509).

4. At the 19th meeting, on 13 November, the representative of Belarus, the Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of the Committee and the proposals contained therein (A/53/21/Rev.1, para. 48).

5. At the same meeting, the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information made an introductory statement, and the representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also made a statement (see A/C.4/53/SR.19).

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/53/21/Rev.1).

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II. Consideration of proposals contained in the report of the Committee on Information

A. Draft resolutions

6. At its 21st meeting, on 17 November, the Committee adopted, without a vote, draft resolutions A and B contained in paragraph 48 of the report of the Committee on Information (see para. 8).

B. Draft decision

7. At its 21st meeting, on 17 November, the Committee adopted, without a vote, the draft decision contained in paragraph 48 of the report of the Committee on Information (see para. 9).

III. Recommendations of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

8. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions:

Questions relating to information

A

Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information,[2]

Taking note also of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,[3]

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

[2] Ibid.

[3] A/53/509.

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and to condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim at, in addition to bilateral cooperation, providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication[4] of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

[4] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, vol. 1, Resolutions*, sect III.4, resolution 4/21.

B

United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reiterating its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to the General Assembly relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat,

Welcoming the fact that the Secretary-General has established a post of Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, with the appointee to that post to head the Department of Public Information, and noting that the Secretary-General concurs with the view expressed in the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities entitled "Global vision, local voice: a strategic communications programme for the United Nations"[5] that the information and communications function should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization,

1. *Reaffirms* its resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946 in which it established the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat;

2. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993;

3. *Expresses its concern* about the trend to reduce the resources allocated to the Department of Public Information, and reiterates that all changes or reductions must be in accordance with the existing budgetary rules as consistent with Article 17 of the Charter of the United Nations;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to implement fully the mandates as established by the General Assembly;

5. *Takes note* of the conceptual framework outlined by the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations public information activities as contained in his report on implementation of the measures regarding information and communications[6] encourages him to further develop his proposals for the reorientation of United Nations activities in the area of public information and communications, taking into account the views of Member States in this regard, and requests him to submit his detailed plan thereon to the Committee on Information for consideration at its twenty-first session in 1999;

6. *Emphasizes* that through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to the developing countries and others with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation should contribute to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of information and communications;

7. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the formation and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peacekeeping and other field operations of the United Nations, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department of Public Information at the planning stage of such future

[5] A/AC.198/1997/CRP.1.

[6] A/AC.198/1998/2.

operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other substantive departments of the Secretariat;

8. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to further strengthen consultative arrangements, as appropriate, between the Department of Public Information and other substantive departments of the Secretariat, in particular those dealing with development issues;

9. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General regarding the review of major publications by the Department of Public Information submitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session,[7] and urges the Secretary-General to exert all efforts to ensure timely production and dissemination in all official languages of the United Nations of all its major publications;

10. *Emphasizes* that the publications should fulfil an identifiable need, should not duplicate other publications inside the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner;

11. *Urges* the Secretary-General to exert all efforts to ensure that publications, as well as other public information products of the Department of Public Information, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization and maintain editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly;

12. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General to ensure full and direct access of the representatives of the Member States to the briefings organized at Headquarters by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General and to ensure wider dissemination of the outcome of such briefings;

13. *Also calls upon* the Secretary-General to exert all efforts to ensure that information to be presented to the media is made available to delegations fully and in a timely fashion;

14. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the evaluation of publications produced by the Department of Public Information in the sphere of development, submitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session,[8] and requests him to renew his efforts to better meet the needs for wider dissemination of development-related information;

15. *Welcomes* the report of the Secretary-General on the evaluation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library submitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session,[9] and encourages him to continue his efforts to introduce the latest technological developments into the work of the Library with a view to ensuring that it continues and strengthens its role as a broadly accessible resource for information on the United Nations for Member States and others;

16. *Reaffirms* the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information in all parts of the world, in particular in developing countries and countries in transition, and especially in those countries where there is need for greater understanding about United Nations activities;

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[7] A/AC.198/1997/3.

[8] A/AC.198/1997/4.

[9] A/AC.198/1997/2 and Add.1.

17. *Also reaffirms* that the United Nations information centres meet the primary objectives outlined by the Committee in its report on its ninth session;[10]

18. *Takes note* of the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities[8] concerning United Nations information centres, including the proposal for the organizing of a United Nations information centres network and the establishment of regional hubs, and notes that these proposals are being considered by the Department of Public Information;

19. *Also takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the results of the trial integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme, submitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session;[11]

20. *Further takes note* of the observation by the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities regarding the substantial problems that some integrated information centres have encountered in performing their information and communications functions, and accordingly requests him to take this experience into account;

21. *Stresses* that the future integration exercise should be carried out in a cost-effective manner and on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country and ensuring that the information functions and the autonomy of the United Nations information centres are not adversely affected, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session;

22. *Emphasizes* the need to review earlier cases of integration of United Nations information centres, in accordance with paragraph 87 of General Assembly resolution 52/220 (III) of 22 December 1997, with a view to rectifying the situation if the need arises;

23. *Requests* that, in respect of developing proposals for the establishment of regional hubs, the views of the Member States concerned be taken fully into account;

24. *Reaffirms* the role of the General Assembly in relation to the opening of new United Nations information centres, and invites the Secretary-General to make such recommendations as he may judge necessary regarding the establishment and location of these centres;

25. *Takes note* of the information provided by the Secretary-General on the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres in 1996,[12] and calls upon him to continue to study ways and means of rationalizing and effecting equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session;

26. *Welcomes* the action by some Member States with regard to providing financial and material support to United Nations information centres in their respective capitals, and invites the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to consult Member States, where appropriate, on the possibility of providing the centres with additional voluntary support on a national basis, bearing in mind that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial requirements for the United Nations information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations;

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[10] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21), chap. III.D, recommendation 36.

[11] A/AC.198/1997/5.

[12] A/AC.198/1997/6.

27. *Takes note* of the requests by Gabon, Guinea, Haiti and Kyrgyzstan for information centres or information components;

28. *Recognizes* the continued enhanced cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University of Peace in Costa Rica as a focal point for promoting United Nations activities and disseminating United Nations information materials;

29. *Expresses its full support* for the wide, accurate, equal and prompt coverage of United Nations activities through the continuation of United Nations press releases both in working languages of the Secretariat, namely English and French, and, where circumstances require, in other languages, and stresses the importance of the continued speedy issue and high quality of those press releases in both working languages;

30. *Stresses* that radio is one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Department of Public Information and an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/44 B;

31. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the development of United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity;[13]

32. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit a report on the design and scope of the pilot project regarding United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity, which will be considered by the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session in 1999;

33. *Notes*, in that context, that the Department of Public Information intends to contact Member States in order to ascertain their preparedness to provide technical facilities for the pilot project and to include that information in the report mentioned in paragraph 32 above;

34. *Encourages* the inclusion of programmes of United Nations Radio, in all available languages, on the United Nations home page on the Internet;

35. *Underlines* the continued importance for the Department of Public Information of using traditional and mass media channels to disseminate information on the United Nations, and encourages the Department of Public Information to take full advantage of recent developments in information technologies, such as the Internet, to improve, in a cost-effective manner, the dissemination of information on the United Nations, taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

36. *Welcomes* the steps being undertaken by the Department of Public Information to strengthen its capacity to carry out its responsibility for both maintaining and coordinating the United Nations home page and for providing its public information content;

37. *Expresses its appreciation* for the ongoing programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries conducted by the Department of Public Information, and calls for its further expansion so as to include a larger number of trainees from developing countries, as well as trainees from countries in transition;

38. *Acknowledges* the important work carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its collaboration with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing nations in disseminating information on priority issues;

[13] A/AC.198/1998/4.

39. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to continue to ensure the greatest possible access for United Nations guided tours, as well as to ensure that displays in public areas are kept as informative, up-to-date, relevant and technologically innovative as possible;

40. *Urges* the Department of Public Information to take the necessary measures, through the provision of relevant and objective information, with a view to achieving the major objectives set forth in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa;[14]

41. *Recalls* its resolutions concerning the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, in particular resolutions 51/138 B of 13 December 1996 and 52/172 of 16 December 1997, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the consequences of this disaster;

42. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session, in 1999, and to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, in 1999, on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

43. *Decides* that, starting from the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information, preparation of the report of the Committee shall be carried out by an open-ended working group;

44. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session;

45. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-fourth session an item entitled "Questions relating to information".

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9. The Committee also recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 90 to 93 members and to appoint Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands as members of the Committee on Information.

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[14] A/52/871-S/1998/318.